

Testimony of

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before the

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, we would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify on the Board's efforts relating to language service review. As this is the first time the Board will testify since celebrating our independence on October 1, 1999, it is also an opportunity to thank this Committee for its work in creating the new, independent BBG in the Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act of 1998.

Independence is an embrace of the idea that all of our broadcasters are journalists who are accurate, objective, and comprehensive in their approach to the delivery of news and information. The creation of this new entity also reaffirms the role of international broadcasting in the new century as a voice of human rights and democratic freedoms with new global challenges and priorities to address.

The creation of an independent BBG also belies statements that we are a Cold War institution whose work is done. International broadcasting will continue to be vital as long as segments of the world's population are denied access to a free press and hunger for alternative sources of news and information about their own countries and the rest of the world. The end of the Cold War was not the end of history; it was not the end of repressive regimes. Our mission is growing as are our methods of delivering news and information to people around the globe.

U.S. international broadcasting reaches out to the world in 61 different languages, touching more than 100 million listeners, viewers, and Internet users. Freedom House estimates that more than four billion people live in societies where governments severely control or suppress print and broadcast media or where the media is only partly free. The Voice of America, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio Free Asia, Worldnet Television, and Radio and TV Marti provide these populations with news, balanced analysis, insights into American policy, and the straight story on what is going on in their own countries. In the past year, we fulfilled our mission during the crisis in Kosovo, providing an accurate source of news and supplying information leading to the reunification of refugee families. We are present in Iran, Iraq, Korea, and Cuba. And we were on the ground in Chechnya through the efforts

of correspondent Andrei Babitsky, whose coverage of that crisis was ultimately ended by the Russian Government.

Language Service Review

U.S. international broadcasting needs to be present where U.S. strategic interests are the most pressing and where credible news and information are restricted or otherwise unavailable. Congress has mandated that the Board "review, evaluate, and determine, at least annually, after consultation with the Secretary of State, the addition or deletion of language services." The process we call "language service review" implements this mandate through a methodology that assesses both the priority and impact of our 61 language services.

Language service review has led us to take some tough decisions. We have reduced broadcasting to areas where we were a mainstay during the Cold War but are newly democratic, and will reallocate resources to other areas of the world that are still repressed or struggling to establish democracy. These decisions are particularly important given that the funding environment for broadcasting is static, but the political and strategic environment offers us new challenges.

The Board recognizes the seriousness of this exercise. Adjustments to language services have direct implications for personnel, budget, and foreign policy. We have not sought to impose such change from the top but rather have sought consensus with the heads of the broadcasting services.

Methodology

Two questions form the basis of language service review - Where should we broadcast? and How well are we broadcasting? We answer the first question by evaluating and ranking all U.S. international broadcasting language services in order of priority, using the criteria of U.S. strategic interests, press freedom, political freedom, economic freedom, and population size. We answer the second question by assessing impact through a service-by-service review, using the criteria of audience size (both general & elite), programming quality, transmission effectiveness, budget, broadcast hours, in-country

awareness, and media environment and use.

Through language service review, we are able to sort our language services in terms of higher and lower priority and higher and lower impact. The goal of the Board in providing a strategic direction for U.S. international broadcasting, and in spending the taxpayers' dollars wisely, is to ensure that we have sufficient impact in the higher priority areas. Toward this end, it is the Board's duty to reallocate resources as necessary among our language services and ultimately decide if we must delete or add specific language services.

Results

As a result of the Board's language service review this year, we have taken decisions to reduce 16 language services, enhance 13 services, and further review 12. The details of these actions are complex. We would highlight here that the reductions have principally affected Voice of America broadcasting in Polish, Hungarian, and Czech as well as Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty broadcasting in Bulgarian and Romanian. These VOA services reach countries that are now NATO members and possess free and open media. The two RFE/RL services have had unsustainably high budgets, reflecting Cold War priorities.

The Board expects to begin selected enhancements in the near future and other enhancements in FY 2001 as funds from the reductions become available after accounting for severance costs. These will include:

- establishing a robust advertising and marketing program in Russia and the Ukraine to support RFE/RL broadcast services;
- acquiring 24-hour FM frequencies in Jakarta and Dili to serve the capital and East Timor, respectively;
- reinstating 13.5 broadcast hours across a range of services for Africa; and
- enlarging the VOA affiliates network in Colombia and enhancing VOA reporting for Colombia by expanding news and information directly related to Colombia.

It is precisely through this type of reallocation of resources, away from the priorities of yesterday and toward the priorities of today and tomorrow, that the Board sees the concrete utility of language service review.

Consultation with the Department of State

We welcome the Secretary of State as an ex officio member of the Board. We have always recognized that U.S. international broadcasting exists to further the broad foreign policy objectives of the United States. Through the Secretary's designee to the Board, Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Evelyn S. Lieberman, we have quickly established an excellent working relationship. We acknowledge our respective roles. We determine what and how we broadcast. The Department of State offers guidance on where we should broadcast and advises us on foreign policy priorities as these relate to U.S. international broadcasting. Early in this year's review process, the Board formally requested the Department's views on these priorities and received a detailed briefing by its Office of Policy Planning. We will be implementing actions regarding Russia, Indonesia, the Ukraine, Africa, among other areas that are fully consistent with Department guidance.

Technology

The language service review process, as noted, looked at transmission effectiveness as one of the criteria in assessing impact. It is imperative that our broadcasts be readily available to our target audiences. We are committed to succeeding in an increasingly multi-media world.

There are two basic issues in achieving this. The first concerns the media we choose to use -- radio, TV, Internet, or a combination of these. Because we broadcast worldwide, we confront every type of media environment. There is no "one size fits all" for use of media to reach our target audiences. What we seek to do is accommodate the media market, do what we feel we can be competitive at, what the priority of the language service requires, and what we can afford. We seek synergies across media. In markets where two of our language services operate, we seek to balance the use of media between the two.

It is not news that TV is on the rise everywhere; it has been so for many years. However, the growing disproportionate access and use of TV in key markets relative to radio is an important factor in our language service review deliberations. WORLDNET TV has been a part of U.S. international broadcasting for two decades. For nearly half that time, selected VOA language services have offered TV simulcasts of their radio shows. Now we find that a visually enhanced TV product in vernacular languages offering timely and relevant news and information could well fill an important niche in many media markets, allowing us to reach new audiences.

We believe the way to structure ourselves to produce this new TV program is through a reorganization of WORLDNET. We have proposed a merger of WORLDNET into VOA to launch a serious, sustained television effort with a single editorial operation. This would leverage VOA's language capabilities and brand name, and WORLDNET's technical capabilities.

As the Internet explodes around the world, it increasingly allows us an efficient and effective synergy with our traditional radio broadcasts, and will meld perfectly with enhanced TV programs. Together, our broadcasters now stream real and archive audio in over 30 languages and archive text in nearly all languages. RFE/RL Web sites, which provide the very best news and information anywhere on the states of the former Soviet Union, receive over 15 million hits per month. The Board has made our expanded use of the Internet a top priority. However, we fully understand its limitations in reaching mass audiences, and are therefore in no way sacrificing our other delivery methods as we pursue this effort.

The second issue concerns how well we distribute our broadcasts via the chosen medium. For both radio and TV we have essentially two options -- direct broadcasts and broadcasts via affiliate stations. Since the end of the Cold War, as media markets in Central and Eastern Europe and elsewhere have opened, FM radio has generally become the medium of choice among radio listeners. To make our programs available on FM, we have had to develop an aggressive radio affiliates recruitment effort. This remains a priority.

At the same time, we have not forsaken direct radio broadcasts via shortwave and medium-wave. Shortwave remains key to reaching audiences in rural areas and across many under-developed nations. Medium-wave, or AM, provides us with yet a third modality that is very effective for shorter-distance yet cross-border situations, and is more amenable to listeners than shortwave. Our shortwave and AM are also the backbone of our essential surge broadcasting capability.

Distributing TV products likewise offers the affiliate option as well as direct-to-home, via satellite. The latter might seem to offer relatively low penetration, but in key areas such as the Gulf states in the Middle East, per capita ownership of satellite dishes is very high. Given that these same households hardly use radio, reaching them at all necessitates a TV product distributed via satellite. In less-developed areas, such as Albania and Kosovo, satellite ownership is surprisingly high. It was to reach the Albanian speakers in these areas that VOA debuted a new Albanian-language TV simulcast program last fall.

Choosing the appropriate medium and distribution means is, therefore, a complex undertaking. In the end, it's a market-by-market determination. Language service review will increasingly focus on the opportunities and trade-offs that this situation demands.

Reductions in Force

One of the unfortunate results of language service review is that some of our broadcast services will lose funded positions and we will be forced to conduct a reduction-in-force (RIF) to downsize these language services. As the Board's review determined a shifting priority from some parts of the world to others, we need to realign personnel resources accordingly. Unlike some other government agencies where jobs may be easily transferred to other positions, it is more difficult to move Voice of America broadcasters from one language service to another, given the high level of language skills and knowledge of the audience that are required. For example, as a result of language service review, broadcasting to Poland will be reduced while broadcasting to Indonesia may ultimately be enhanced. But we cannot easily transfer a Polish

broadcaster to the Indonesian service unless he or she has the required language skills.

While this is a regrettable situation, we can assure you that we will be working diligently to provide affected employees with appropriate counseling, assistance in pursuing employment leads, and consideration in matching their skills against vacancies that may occur within our organization or elsewhere in the Federal Government. We expect to be able to provide new employment opportunities within the BBG to some of the 51 employees who will be displaced by the pending RIF. Some others are eligible for retirement. But we are committed to providing the best possible assistance to these employees that we can.

Mr. Chairman, we are proud of the recent accomplishments of each of the broadcasting entities under the supervision of the BBG and we are proud to be a part of broadcasting's long history of achievement. Language service review is not an exercise designed to penalize a service or to augment one broadcast entity to the detriment of the other. Each service has a specific mission to accomplish and each must refocus its broadcast targets to preserve its greatest impact on a changing world. Savings gained from reductions in a broadcast entity will be used to bolster its programs to other areas of the world. For example, while VOA's programming may be reduced in Eastern Europe, the savings from these reductions will eventually flower as new programming in Indonesia, Africa, and other parts of the world.

Recent Broadcasting Challenges

While the focus of this hearing is devoted to the process for identifying the priority and impact of our language services, we would also like to take this opportunity to stress some of the recent challenges and accomplishments of each of the broadcast entities. Perhaps the most dramatic story of recent months has been in Russia with respect to RFE/RL's coverage of the war in Chechnya. As this committee well knows, RFE/RL correspondent Andrei Babitsky was detained by the Russians because of his on the scene coverage of that conflict, telling the Russian people and others in the region the facts behind the war, including the carnage in the Chechen civilian population, the drama of the refugees, and the death toll among Russian soldiers. Mr. Babitsky's own human drama brought to light the work

that is being done around the world by the correspondents of each of our service entities, bringing news and information to societies that do not enjoy the free flow of information.

In the past several years, broadcasting has tackled many challenges, both technological and ideological. Broadcasting to the former Yugoslavia was dramatically expanded during the NATO airstrikes and mass killings of Kosovar Albanians by the Serb militia. Both VOA in Albanian and Serbian, and RFE in its South Slavic service, rose to meet the challenge. We established new services to the Balkans, with RFE in Albanian and VOA in Macedonian, leading the way in establishing the "Ring around Serbia" of FM stations broadcasting news from British, German, and French international broadcasters. A network of more than 30 affiliate stations was created in Bosnia which carries a two-hour Bosnian language program and a Serbian language newscast that updated audiences on Kosovo throughout the day.

We are working to update and streamline our technical capacity to better meet future challenges. A VOA-TV and Worldnet pilot program demonstrated that we can take advantage of VOA's global network of foreign and U.S. correspondents for radio and television in a multimedia approach. We are continuing to work toward the conversion to digital systems that can allow a single digital journalistic product to be available via radio, TV, or the internet without costly conversion. We have refined and expanded websites to provide Internet access to news, information, and analysis.

Voice of America

The events of 1999 were challenging for the VOA as it launched its 53rd language service by initiating broadcasts in Macedonian to the Balkans. When the Kosovo crisis led to NATO bombing, VOA was on the air to give accurate and objective information to Albanians and Serbs. As Milosevic cracked down on indigenous private media, VOA stepped up its broadcasting and transmissions to the region in conjunction with sister stations RFE/RL, BBC, Radio France International, and Deutsche Welle. Special programming in Albanian helped families separated by the fighting to find each other in the refugee camps. Newly trained video journalists were able to capture the Kosovo story and give

an honest picture of events to audiences in the Balkans, Russia, and China who had been receiving misleading information from their governments.

As VOA moves into the new century, it is diversifying the ways audiences can choose to access its news and information programs. While still primarily a radio network, VOA is increasingly making programs available for television and Internet broadcasting. These media help us reach a broader and more diverse audience in certain countries where the reliance on international radio and shortwave is declining. This was demonstrated during coverage of the recent elections in Taiwan, as VOA's China Branch provided live Mandarin updates and analysis, simulcast for radio, TV and the Internet and viewed by large audiences in Taiwan and Mainland China.

Last January, VOA won its first silver medal in the category of Television News Special at the New York Festivals, taking the prize for a feature on a young woman's search for her family among the thousands of refugees crossing into Albania during the Kosovo war. In addition to authoritative news broadcasts, VOA offers its listeners music, education, cultural and call-in shows. Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, VOA is on the air to bring America's story and America's point of view to an estimated 91 million regular listeners worldwide.

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), on the air for half a century this year, broadcasts more than 800 hours a week in 26 languages providing daily news, analysis and current affairs programming for a coherent, objective account of the events in their region and the world.

As a surrogate radio, or "home service" to countries where the media are struggling amid chaotic economic conditions and often dictatorships to achieve financial and editorial independence, RFE/RL's mission remains the promotion of democratic values and institutions by disseminating factual information and ideas. Based on the conviction that the first requirement of democracy is a well-informed citizenry, RFE/RL strives to provide objective news and analysis; help strengthen civil societies; combat ethnic and religious intolerance; and provide a model for local media.

RFE/RL maintains 22 bureaus and has regular ties with more than 1,000 local freelancers and stringers. It uses short-wave broadcasts to reach its listeners, but increasingly is utilizing AM/FM stations through 98 affiliate partners in all its broadcast countries except Belarus, Iran, Iraq, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. In addition, RFE/RL maintains an active presence on the Internet.

RFE/RL, with its extensive news coverage of events in Serbia, Kosovo and Montenegro, was able to penetrate the information blockage imposed on Yugoslav citizens by President Slobodan Milosovic during last year's military conflict with NATO. A dramatic example of the effectiveness of RFE/RL broadcasts was reported by NATO and US officials. On May 19-20, 1999 NATO spokesman Jamie Shea and U.S. State Department spokesman Jamie Rubin gave RFE/RL credit for breaking the news that police units loyal to Serbian President Slobodan Milosovic had used water cannon against 600 women and children in the town of Krusevac who were protesting the fact that their husbands and fathers were fighting and being killed in Kosovo. When Serbian troops heard these and other reports of police brutality against their families, they deserted the battlefield to come home and defend their loved ones.

In Armenia, an RFE/RL correspondent was on the scene when gunmen attacked the Parliament building on October 27, 1999, and killed the Prime Minister, Vazgen Sarkisyan, the speaker of the Parliament and six other Armenian political leaders. The correspondent telephoned Prague headquarters from the Parliament building and broke the story.

Radio Free Asia

Like RFE/RL, Radio Free Asia (RFA) is a surrogate radio service broadcasting to areas where the media is controlled. For over three years RFA has been broadcasting via short wave to China, Tibet, North Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and Burma. With the help of Congress, seven months ago RFA completed its build-up to 24 hours of daily programming to China in multiple languages and dialects. Programming is in Mandarin at 12 hours a day, Tibetan in three different dialects at 8 hours a day, three hours of Cantonese, one hour of Uyghur, and an hour-and-a-half a week of Shanghaiese. RFA strives to reach the largest and most diverse audience possible. Listener

response indicates that RFA has been successful in reaching across age groups and all walks of life.

RFA continues to break stories in its target countries, such as unrest in Xinjiang's Hotan region reported by the Uyghur service. Aggressive reporting on events in North Korea is carried almost weekly by South Korean newspapers and news agencies. RFA continues to cover extensively the Vietnamese government's crackdown on the United Buddhist church and the Hoa Hao Buddhist sect. The recently inaugurated Tibetan call-in program is the only forum of its kind where Chinese and Tibetan callers have the opportunity to discuss with each other social and political issues. In Cambodia, RFA broadcasts about the existence of secret illegal marijuana plantations led to the public burning of the fields by Prime Minister Hun Sen. The Mandarin Service obtained the first interview with Dickinson College scholar Song Yongyi following his release from a Chinese prison. He had been accused of purchasing "intelligence for foreigners" during a trip to China to gather information on the Cultural Revolution. And since RFA's first broadcasts to China, it has reported on worker protests that went unreported by the Chinese and Western media.

Broadcasting to Cuba

The Office of Cuba Broadcasting (OCB) provides coordinated management of the Radio Marti and TV Marti programs from its headquarters in Miami, Florida. Radio and TV Marti are dedicated to the promotion of freedom and democracy in Cuba, with a programmatic strategy based on the promotion of human rights. Last year, Radio Marti provided coverage of: the Ibero-American Summit in Lisbon, Portugal, interviewing 17 presidents; the Rio Group Meeting; the Caribbean Summit in the Dominican Republic, the First Lady's visit to Nicaragua and Honduras; and the U.N. Human Rights Commission. Radio and TV Marti continue to provide information to the people of Cuba through reports of the most important U.S. news stories, digests of world news, stories related to Cuba. Among these reports are information on political repression in Cuba, stories on the plight of dissidents, coverage of the U.S. presidential race, and of the events surrounding the case of Elian Gonzalez. This year, TV Marti will develop two new programs. The first, designed to reach women in Cuba, will feature in-depth analysis and discussion of political

changes in Cuba and women's health and medicine. The second will feature a political analyst and an economist who will analyze and discuss local and international issues that affect Cuba.

Again, thank you for this opportunity to share with you the results of the first language service review and to highlight some of the accomplishments of each of the service entities over the past year. We would be glad to answer any questions you or other Members of the Committee might have.